Study Issues RTI Proactive Disclosure Rankings of Pakistan's 39 Federal Ministries

ISLAMABAD, September 27: In breach of Article 19-A of the Constitution guaranteeing access to information by the state to its citizens and the Federal Right of Access to Information Act, 2017, all the federal ministries in the government of Pakistan perform poorly in complying with the proactive disclosure clause of the Act, resulting in impeding transparency, accountability and access to information, a new research study has revealed.

In breach of the law, 17 of the total 46 federal ministries functional between the last day of the federal PML-N government and the start of the PTI government in 2018 did not even have websites while the remaining 27 that did, most failed spectacularly at complying with Section 5 of the Act dealing with proactive disclosure requiring all federal public bodies, including federal ministries, in providing a set of a minimum of 39 categories of information.

This also represents a failure by Pakistan to comply with its commitments made under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16.10.02 relating to transparency, good governance and development related to implementation of policy and statutory guarantees on access to information.

The study, conducted by the Islamabad-based Institute of Research, Advocacy and Development (IRADA), has been released on the eve of International Day for Universal Access to Information (IUDAI), which is globally commemorated every year on September 28. Titled '*Impeding Transparency, Accountability and Access to Information: Inactive Government on Proactive Disclosure,*' the study maps the dereliction of duty by the federal government under the Federal Right of Access to Information Act, 2017, through an assessment of the state of compliance of statutory obligations of proactive information disclosure by the federal ministries of Pakistan.

This study, co-authored by Muhammad AftabAlam and Adnan Rehmat, specifically investigates compliance with the most progressive clause of the Federal Right of Access to Information, 2017 – Section 5: proactive disclosure of a set of 39 categories of information that each federal public body is required to provide to the people.

The study shows that even among the 29 federal ministries online, most perform from bad to poor in terms of the set of 39 mandatory categories of information they must disclose proactively. Even the best performing federal ministry in this regard – the Ministry of Finance – scores less than 50% in terms of compliance with proactive disclosure requirements. The four worst performing ministries are in less than 20% compliance with the proactive disclosure requirements.

Even worse, most federal ministries fail to provide over half the categories of information on their website required under the proactive disclosure clause. Only

five of the 39 categories of information are provided by a majority – around 80% – of the 29 ministries.

The definition of a 'public body,' given in the federal RTI law, encompasses all federal ministries, courts, parliament, and several incorporated and unincorporated bodies working under the federal statutes. As per the Act, each public body is required to publish and upload over internet, the information and records, mentioned in Section 5 within six months of the commencement of the Act.

Since the law was enacted in October 2, 2017, all 'public bodies' were supposed to proactively disclose this information by April 13, 2018. However, a big majority of public bodies still lag significantly behind in either ensuring their online presence or, if their websites exist, provide only a limited amount of information proactively.

The study assesses compliance of statutory obligations of proactive information disclosure by only the federal ministries from amongst all the federal public bodies to Identify federal ministries that maintain official web-based/online presence; Assess the state of proactive disclosure compliance by these ministries; and Rank the federal ministries in terms of compliance of obligations under Section 5 of the Act.

(For further details on the report and its findings, please contact Mr. Muhammad AftabAlam, Executive Director IRADA and co-author of the report on ed@irada.org.pk)